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Allerton

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Allerton

It was after five o'clock in the afternoon. Only one event remained before the word *finis* would be written on the Buchanan County Fair for 1889. And yet, despite the lateness of the hour, scarcely a person left the grounds. All remained to witness a spectacle never equaled on a race track anywhere — a match between Axtell and Allerton.

At last the horses appeared and began jogging around the track to warm up. Trainer John Hussey was up behind Allerton while Williams drove Axtell. The latter was the favorite but John Hussey had an abiding faith in Allerton. The colts got the word for an even start with Allerton at the pole. "They trotted to the quarter as one horse in :33 $\frac{3}{4}$; around the turn and down the stretch and past the stand they swept, and on around the lower turn and up the back stretch, still moving grandly together as though going to pole. Around the upper turn Axtell was driven wide and Allerton had drawn ahead nearly a length when they rounded into the home stretch. Here Williams began to send Axtell, and fifty yards from the wire they were on even terms.

John Hussey was encouraging Allerton with voice and whip, and in spite of Axtell's efforts Allerton was sent under the wire a winner by a nose in 2:22. The king of colts had been fairly beaten in the finish by his scarcely less kingly stable companion, and John Hussey was the proudest man that ever rode a sulky. He had driven his favorite a grand winning heat."

Allerton was the son of Jay Bird who, like the sire of Axtell, was a son of the mighty George Wilkes and inherited the strain of Rysdyk's Hambletonian. On his dam's side Allerton was more strongly bred than Axtell for Gussie Wilkes was by Mambrino Boy out of Dora Wilkes, the latter tracing her blood through George Wilkes to Hambletonian. Allerton was a handsome colt, brown with white spots on his front coronets and white hind ankles. Unlike the stubborn Axtell, he was kind and gentle, and remained so always. He loved to frisk about playfully when Williams took him out for a jog and at times became so animated he could scarcely keep his feet on the ground. As a three-year-old Allerton stood $16.0\frac{1}{4}$ hands high at the withers, $15.3\frac{1}{2}$ on the hips, and weighed 1150 pounds.

A colt that can trot two races of eight fast heats within four days, the last the fastest of all, must be formed for stamina and speed. He must have

no weaknesses in either mental or physical make-up to live out such an ordeal to the end. Such a colt was Allerton, in the opinion of his owner. "The depth through the heart region is simply abnormal", he declared, "the brisket is very full and the shoulder itself grandly muscled, running away back at the withers into a wonderfully strong back, muscled over the loin like Wedgewood or Director. The length backward from the point of the hip is very fine and the breadth across is remarkable. There is something in the contour of Allerton's quarters and hind parts which reminds one of the immortal Dexter. A good many old-time turfmen have been struck by the resemblance. The formation is extremely speedy, and through the stifles and gaskins the muscular development suggests tremendous power. Allerton's hocks are quite low set, as perfect and clean as if chiseled from marble, and his legs and feet are of the highest quality. He has a bright, expressive head, with prominent eyes and thin, shapely ears."

Allerton began his career at Keokuk as a two-year-old in the fall of 1888. Black Wing won the first two heats in 2:54 and 2:52, but Allerton took the last three in 2:52, 2:50, and 3:10, a victory which clearly demonstrated his staying qualities. Allerton won his race at Des Moines in

three straight heats and lowered his record to 2:48½; at Cedar Rapids he trotted against time in 2:42¾; and at Independence he won the two-year-old race without improving his record. He met his only defeat of the season at Lexington, Kentucky. Nevertheless, 2:40¼ was inscribed on his two-year-old banner.

In his three-year-old form Allerton participated in ten engagements, all of his races being against older horses. His first triumph was at Minneapolis where he defeated a field of eleven seasoned campaigners in the 2:38 trot and made a record of 2:24½ in the fourth heat, a performance "never equalled by a three-year-old colt in a race so early in the season". The following week he returned to Saint Paul and won the 2:40 trot in straight heats, setting a record of 2:23 in the second heat of this race after being jogged home to avoid distancing the field. Early in August he was driven two exhibition miles at Cleveland in 2:20½ and 2:19.

His remarkable performance in the Brewster Stakes at Chicago elicited applause from the Chicago *Inter-Ocean*. After winning the first two heats of the 2:35 trot in 2:21¼ and 2:24½, Allerton lost the third and fourth heats in 2:25¼ and 2:23¾. In the fifth heat he trotted a "grand race, laying third till the head of the stretch, when

after a rattling finish he beat John W. by a neck in 2:24, the first instance of a three-year-old trotting a fifth heat in that time in a field of older horses."

Three days later, when everybody felt Allerton would have to lay up for a while, the game colt came out again in another class race against aged horses. To the astonishment of everybody, Allerton was never headed from start to finish, although he was forced to go the first heat in 2:24, repeat in 2:21, and then win the third in 2:18 $\frac{1}{4}$ with a fighting finish.

An excited observer has graphically portrayed this struggle between Allerton and Bassenger Boy. "Down the stretch they came at a tremendous pace, neck-and-neck for the lead, with Allerton shaking his head like a bull-dog and doing his level best. At the distance stand it looked as though Bassenger was winning". Then Williams "was seen to draw his whip for a kind of despairing last effort. Down it went on Allerton's back with a sharp tap as they neared the stand. The baby race horse switched his tail, shook his head in an angry kind of way, and actually let out another link and won by a full half-length, right under the wire".

"I was proud of Axtell on the day he carried me a mile in 2:12 at Terre Haute", Williams de-

clared, "but I am free to confess that I felt a keener thrill of admiration" for Allerton when he won the Brewster Stakes. "When the great colt flashed past the post in that heat, with Bassenger Boy at his saddle, still trying to win, I think he placed to his credit the gamest and greatest — if not the most brilliant — record ever made by a three-year-old."

A few weeks later Allerton wrenched his ankle badly at Des Moines and was forced to retire. Little improvement was shown in the spring of 1890 and he was in poor form throughout most of the season. Nevertheless, he was asked to reduce his record on several occasions and in almost every instance his determined spirit triumphed over his bodily infirmity. He went into winter quarters as a four-year-old having reduced his record by six successive steps — 2:16 $\frac{3}{4}$, 2:16 $\frac{1}{4}$, 2:15 $\frac{1}{2}$, 2:14, 2:13 $\frac{3}{4}$, and 2:13 $\frac{1}{2}$.

It was this noble animal who faced Nancy Hanks in 1891. Although handicapped by his heavy stud service, Allerton was trained carefully and faithfully. Nancy Hanks and Margaret S. were pointed for this particular match alone but the latter had been ill and was in poor condition. In the pools before the race, Nancy Hanks sold for \$500, Allerton for \$235, and Margaret S. for \$30.

A spirit of anxious expectancy pervaded the multitude of spectators at Rush Park as the starter's bell rang. Hundreds climbed upon the roof of the amphitheater. A crowd thirty lines deep extended far down the stretch on the outside fence. Fully three thousand spectators stood in the infield, and the stands were closely packed with ladies. Celebrated sport writers from far and near occupied the press box.

Shortly after two o'clock Allerton appeared, handsome, strong, determined, his rich brown coat shining like silk. Prolonged applause greeted Williams and his proud stallion. Budd Doble next came forth on the high-wheeled sulky behind Nancy Hanks and was warmly greeted. Margaret S. and her driver, George Starr, received another round of applause.

Allerton drew the pole. On the fourth score they were sent off with Nancy Hanks, who was in the middle, a neck ahead of the other two horses. Up the stretch they went to the furlong post, head and head, when Margaret S. dropped behind. Allerton gained steadily on the flying Nancy and was a half length in the lead at the quarter. As they rounded into the long turn the stallion increased his advantage, and at the half, which was reached in 1:04½, daylight showed between them. Then Doble called on Nancy and

she closed the gap in an instant. They came into the stretch on even terms. Nancy gained the lead, but Allerton was closing rapidly when he broke and lost a length and a half. Though he caught himself quickly and came on again, the wire was near and Nancy won by half a length in the unprecedented time of 2:12.

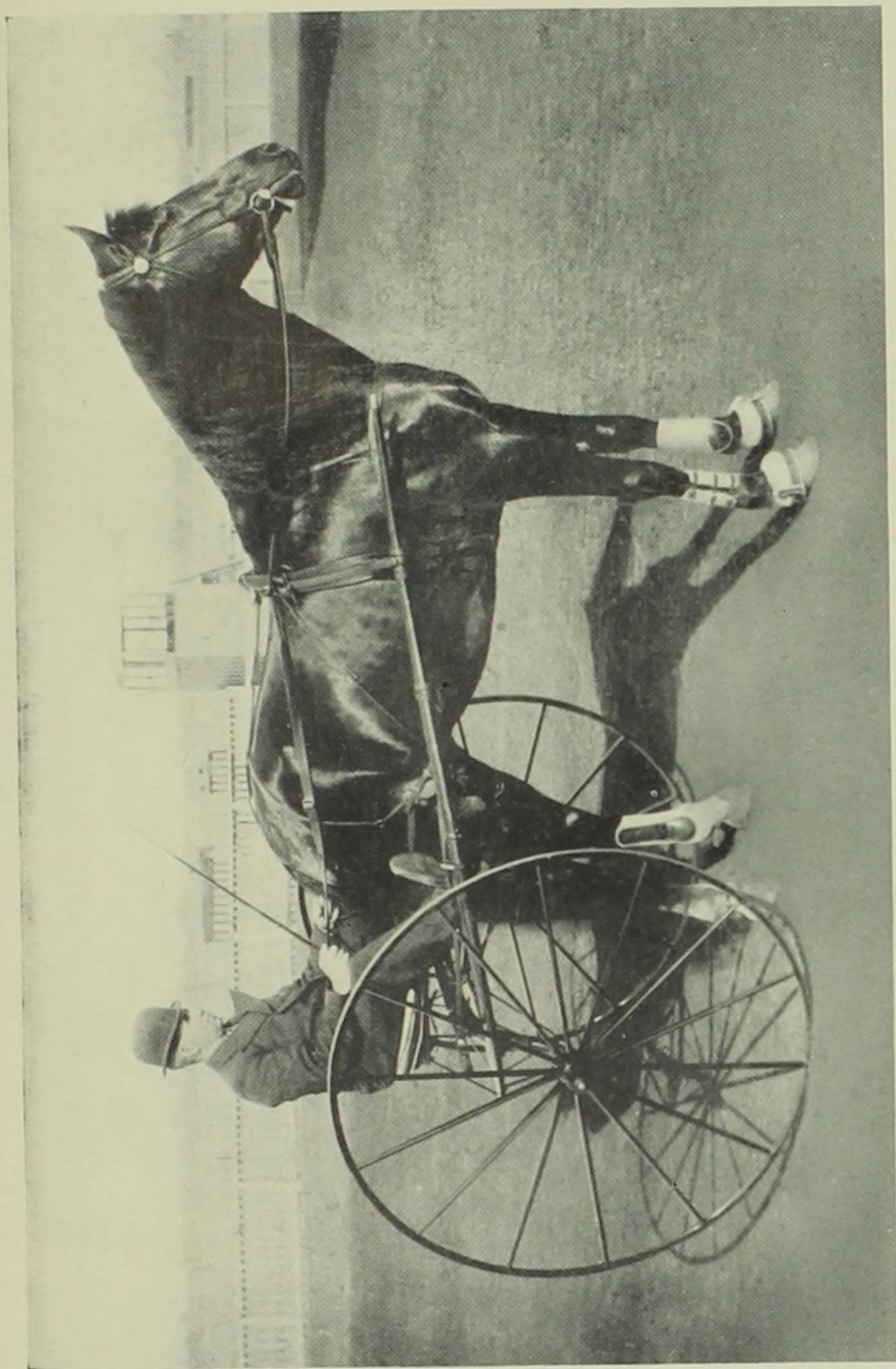
In the second heat Allerton came to the wire a trifle in the lead but at a pull and Nancy passed him in a twinkling. He broke before the amphitheater was passed but settled down and was at the mare's wheel when the turn was reached. At the head of the stretch the two champions began a terrific finish but Allerton broke at the distance and Nancy won by two lengths.

The third heat opened with all three horses going like "bullets" to the turn, where Margaret S. dropped back beaten. The others continued their flight of speed around the bend with Allerton on the outside and a neck in front. "When they straightened away for the long brush home", an eye-witness declared, "each horse and each driver strained every nerve, and no gamer pair ever flashed under the wire at better than a two minute gait, but the mare simply had a trifle the most speed, and finished with daylight between her and Allerton". The time of the three heats was 2:12, 2:12 $\frac{3}{4}$, and 2:12. Although the Ken-

tucky mare was the victor, she had been forced to "go three faster heats than a trotter ever went" to win a race. "It was the greatest race on earth", declared an enthusiastic Tennessean.

At this time the supreme trotting stallion was Nelson. Driven by his owner, C. H. Nelson, this great horse had lowered Axtell's record of 2:12 by a half second on the kite track at Kankakee, Illinois. On October 21, 1890, he trotted in 2:10 $\frac{3}{4}$ at Cambridge City, Indiana. For a year this record remained unchallenged until Allerton brushed it aside at Independence on September 4, 1891, with a mark of 2:10. Nelson tied this mark at Grand Rapids, Michigan, and immediately a challenge was issued for a match.

At least twenty thousand people turned out at Grand Rapids to see Allerton and Nelson battle for the stallion trotting championship and a purse of \$10,000. In the betting pools, Allerton sold for \$100 to \$66 for Nelson. They were sent off with Nelson slightly in the lead and hugging the pole. At the first turn Nelson was a half length in front. They reached the half in 1:05 $\frac{1}{4}$ with Allerton a length behind. The breathless crowds in the stands were on their feet as the horses came into the stretch with Allerton rapidly closing the gap. Suddenly he broke, giving Nelson a three length advantage at the distance and, although he



COURTESY OF F. M. SHORES

ALLERTON WITH WILLIAMS DRIVING

came on with an "electrical burst of speed", Nelson won by a half length in 2:13.

Nevertheless Allerton remained the favorite in the betting. In the second heat they were off at the first score. Nelson was urged to the limit, passing the quarter in :32 $\frac{1}{4}$ with Allerton a half length behind. Up the back stretch his lead was increased. As they came into the stretch Nelson was ahead by two lengths but rapidly tiring. He made a final rally under the whip but the pace was too fast. When Allerton "collared" him twenty yards from the wire he had enough and Allerton won by a half length in 2:14 $\frac{1}{2}$ with one of the "finest finishes ever witnessed". Intense excitement prevailed and prolonged cheers greeted Allerton.

Before the third heat Allerton brought \$25 to \$6 for Nelson. The Maine stallion, clearly demonstrating his great flight of speed for a short distance, took the pole at the start, but not without a "palpable foul" as he pulled in front of Allerton so that Williams had to take his horse back. "Nelson is at the quarter in 32 seconds", wrote Milton A. Smith who witnessed the race, "with Allerton moving along easily three lengths in the rear. 'Look at him! Look at him!', cried Nelson's friends as on he sped, increasing his lead at every stride." But they forgot that he was

racing with a horse who did not know how to give up. "Nelson goes to the three-quarter pole in 1:40 and still Allerton has made no play for the heat. Even his friends begin to get a little nervous as they notice the long lead of the Maine stallion, but coming down the home stretch the brown colt strikes a 2:00 gait and when he comes up to Nelson it is all over; he passes him as though he was going the other way. Mr. Williams eases him up and he wins by three lengths in a jog; time, 2:15."

The fourth and final heat opened with no pools sold. As they passed the quarter on even terms, C. H. Nelson, in his flashy cardinal colors, realized that he could not win. "Williams, I guess you've got me beat", he called to his opponent. Up the back stretch they went together but at the distance Allerton began to draw away. Nelson called on his horse but he had no brush left, seeing which Williams pulled up and Allerton won the heat at a jog in 2:16½. Although Allerton took the "largest purse ever won by a trotting horse", he did not establish a new record. Wild excitement prevailed, hats and cushions filled the air, and the applause was deafening. Allerton was presented with an elegant blanket of cut roses.

A return match with Nancy Hanks had been

arranged for Allerton at Lexington, Kentucky. A purse of \$8,000 was offered, but when the great day arrived Nancy Hanks was withdrawn, ostensibly because of an injury, and Delmarch, who held the stallion race record and was undefeated that year, was substituted. Bitterly disappointed, Williams showed great sportsmanship in accepting the substitution for he would lose much more than \$8,000 if Allerton were defeated. Between 18,000 and 25,000 people came in "carriages, carts, surreys, and fashionable turnouts loaded with Kentucky beauty". Allerton was the favorite \$100 to \$65, but just before the match Delmarch was selling even and one bookmaker lay eight to five that Allerton would not win the first heat.

Allerton received a tremendous ovation as he jogged briskly up the track with his mane and foretop gaily decorated with blue ribbons. Delmarch drew the pole and they were off after scoring three or four times. Allerton won easily in 2:13 $\frac{1}{4}$. The next two heats also went to Allerton in 2:15 and 2:15 $\frac{3}{4}$.

The Lexington meet closed Allerton's great races for 1891 and he retired for the winter with the world's stallion record of 2:09 $\frac{1}{4}$ made in an exhibition on the kite track at Independence on September 19, 1891. Unfortunately summers on

the west coast are longer, and on November 17th at Stockton, California, Palo Alto wrested the crown from him in 2:08 $\frac{3}{4}$.

In the following year when he was six years old, Allerton was injured in a race against Lobasco at Davenport, and was retired for the remainder of the season. He never raced again. Although he sired more trotters and pacers in the standard list than Axtell, his great racing ability has not been perpetuated as in Axtell's progeny.

Allerton's thrilling races won the hearts of all who loved a game horse. While Axtell never trotted against Sunol or any of the champions, Allerton met and conquered Nelson, Delmarch, McDoel, and lost to Nancy Hanks. Axtell never lowered his 2:12 record but Allerton reduced his mark to 2:09 $\frac{1}{4}$ as a five-year-old and was crowned the stallion champion of the world.

When Williams traded his horses for Canadian land, Allerton went with the rest but not as a part of the sale. Provision was made for the noble horse, then eighteen years old, to be given a comfortable home at Indianola until his death. He spent his last years in the State to which he brought great fame in his youth.

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